

## No. II.—THE GREAT INDIAN HORNBILL IN CAPTIVITY.

(With two Plates.)

In August, 1894, just three years ago, Mr. H. Ingle of Karwar presented to our Society a young male specimen of the Great Indian Hornbill (*Dichoceros bicornis*), which was then apparently about four months old. It was fairly tame when it arrived, and was ready to make friends with any one who fed it, and especially with those who could find time to play with it occasionally.

Since its arrival it has grown steadily, both in stature and in friendliness, and may now be said to be quite a popular character in Bombay society, where, owing to the brilliant yellow colouring of its huge beak, and the position it has gained for itself as a member of the Museum Staff, it is familiarly referred to as the "Office Canary."

The accompanying photographs were taken some months ago by Mr. E. Comber, and they convey a very fair idea of the shape and plumage of this curious bird, but in the back view the white tip of the tail has unfortunately come out quite dark, owing to a shadow, while the brilliant yellow colour of the neck feathers, the casque, and the upper part of the beak must, of course, be imagined. The bird may now be considered to be fully grown, as it measures 4'-3" from the tip of its beak to the extremity of its tail, but the front part of the casque is still perfectly flat on the top, whereas in adult specimens it is deeply concave. The irides also are now only just beginning to assume the blood-red colour which is one of the characteristics of the full-grown male.

Its food consists of plantains (which it swallows whole when hungry) and all sorts of jungle fruit, such as banyan berries and wild figs, but it is always glad of live lizards, mice, scorpions, snails, beetles, and centipedes, and when such animal food is not forthcoming we give it small pieces of raw meat, which it eats with avidity. When it first came, water was placed in its cage daily, but as it never made any use of it, either for bathing or drinking, we gave up the practice, and have long since ceased to give the bird any liquid food. It appears, however, to enjoy the rain, which drives into its cage with full force during the monsoon months.

It is suspicious of strangers, and inclined to be savage, striking viciously at them, against the wire netting of its cage, but to those with whom it is familiar, it is exceedingly gentle and exhibits a considerable display of affection by attempting to put food into one's mouth, and by other birdlike endearments. It never appears to get tired of playing, and the way in which it catches a tennis ball when thrown at it, with considerable force, from a distance of 30 feet, excites the admiration of all our Museum visitors.

It never makes any noise unless it is hungry, and then it shouts for its food in a loud, braying, rasping voice, which can be heard all over the building and which quickly summons its attendant.

By far the most curious thing about this quaint bird is the fact that the bright yellow colour on the casque, the upper part of the beak, the neck, and to a certain extent on the white wing feathers, is artificial, inasmuch as it is put on by the bird itself. The specimen in the Society's rooms can be seen any morning carefully painting itself up for the day. With the extreme tip of its beak it arranges the small feathers which surround the uropygial gland on its back, at the root of the tail, and then proceeds to rub its casque and neck on to the open gland, which is about the size of a shilling, and from which an oily yellow secretion is exuded. This it does several times during the early part of the day, and for some hours afterwards the yellow colour is apt to come off on to one's hands and clothes when the bird is romping with its friends.

H. M. PHIPSON.

BOMBAY, August, 1897.

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#### NO. III.—THE GREAT INDIAN HORNBILL IN THE WILD STATE.

Mr. Phipson has asked me to state on oath what I know as to the character and habits of the prisoner at the bar—I mean the bird in the cage, at our Society's Rooms, which he has described in the foregoing note. This I do with pleasure.

The names by which this bird is known are many, being *Homrai* in Nepal, *Banrao* in Mussoorie (both words meaning "King of the Jungles"), *Garuda* amongst the Canarese, *Male moraki* in Malayalum, *Hwang* in Assam, and *Ouk-chin-gyi* amongst the Burmese; but notwithstanding all this, like Ali Baba's famous Nubby Bux, he means nothing by it, and a child might play with him—that is, when he is in a good temper.

Scientific folks call him *Dichoceros bicornis*, the Great Hornbill, and he is great, the biggest of his tribe in India, measuring fully four feet from tip of beak to tip of tail, with wings in proportion, the noise whereof, when he is flying, can be heard a mile off. As can be inferred from his many names, he is widely distributed in India, and is not only common, but obtrusive where he occurs.

In the forests of Burma and Tenasserim *D. bicornis* is particularly plentiful, going about sometimes in pairs, but generally in parties of five to twenty in number.

Once in my early days in Burma I was encamped in high forest close to the bank of the Salween river. It was the month of February, and the various species of *Ficus*—*F. religiosa*, *F. indica*, &c.—were in full fruit. I do not think I have ever seen forest fruits of all kinds in such abundance since. All fruit-eating birds, but especially Hornbills, swarmed, and of these *D. bicornis* was in great force. The whizzing creak of their wings was incessant through the day round my camp, and in the early mornings and evenings



Photographed by E. Comber.

Mintern Bros. Photo imp. London.

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From a live specimen in the Society's Rooms.



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